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Fair Winds and Following Seas: Reflections from the Departing Navy Surgeon General

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By Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson, Jr., U.S. Navy Surgeon General and Chief, Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

As I prepare to leave my position as the 36th Surgeon General of the Navy this week, I find myself reflecting on days past, lessons learned and the state of Navy Medicine today.

When I was growing up, I always wanted to be a doctor. My dad was a doctor and most children will emulate their parents. But I ended up getting a degree in political science and taking a lot of courses in German—comparative literature courses, and also Anthropology courses. But during that time I found that I was called, for some reason, to do medicine. I decided that I would never be satisfied unless I became a physician.

I came into the Navy as a way to finance my medical education. The year I was accepted in 1972 was also the first year of the Health Profession's Scholarship Program. So I was in the first class of Health Profession Scholars and that is how I paid for my medical education.

The reason I stayed in the Navy after I came on active duty was that I had never found a better group of men and women who were dedicated to service and dedicated to one and other – men and women who had an ethos of honor, courage and commitment, which in the civilian side probably sounds trite and maybe even as sloganeering, but on the military side is a commitment and a framework by which we live and do our work on a daily basis. I had never experienced that before in my life.

Now, decades later, after countless patients and many, many commands, I am taking with me more than 30 years of memories. The memory of my patients and what I have learned from them is that care and caring for them was not only beneficial to them as human beings, but it was also a tremendous benefit to me. In the process of giving to others, you also receive a lot for yourself.

We can always be there for our patients from an emotional, physiological and even spiritual perspective so that they never feel abandoned or alone. I learned from my patients that even when you couldn't cure them, you could certainly be with them.

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I have had several priorities throughout my years as your surgeon general, but perhaps the most important is the emphasis we have placed on patient and family-centered care. Patient and family-centered care is a commitment to all who we have the privilege to serve. That is our duty and obligation.

The men and women of Navy Medicine are the essence and heart and soul of Navy Medicine. Navy Medicine is about the men and women who carry on the hard work, who labor in the vineyards, who deploy with our troops into harm's way on a daily basis. It's about the men and women who deploy on our carriers and other surface ships, submarines and aircraft through the world on a daily basis, who do the hard work to make sure that freedom reigns throughout this country and in many other countries to make sure that the commitment that we make to others, as being a nation to help win the peace as well as winning the wars, is captured and to make sure that when we have people who are in need of medical care, psychological care and when we find people in need, we're there to help them and to make their lives better. I only want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to be a part of such a great group of individuals. I have been incredibly privileged and honored to lead them and I have enjoyed every moment of that experience and I thank you all for the opportunity. Fair winds and following seas!

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